
Stable War or Stable Peace?

by Hanna Newcombe

A very short definition of "security" is simply "freedom from fear." This lends itself to extending the concept in two directions from the usual narrow concept of national military security: (1) To include also economic, resource, monetary, and environmental security -- somewhat in the spirit of Gerald and Pat Mische's book Toward a Human World Order. (2) From national to international security -- abandoning the dividing line between "us" and "them" and striving for a greater freedom from fear for all of us humans. This corresponds to Johansen's recent writing on "the Human Interest."

Insecurity consists largely of uncertainty: the fear of not having our basic wants satisfied in the future. Following Maslow's hierarchy of needs loosely, we need assurance of our physical survival (which implies both freedom from violent attack and freedom from starvation), safeguarding of our needs for personal freedom and independence, and a supply of human warmth and fellowship. If any of these values become uncertain, we feel threatened, "insecure." And very legitimately so, because these things are our basic human rights.

International crises seem threatening because they increase uncertainty as to what will happen. According to Patricia Close, uncertainty is a major factor in crises. People who feel insecure, including national leaders, are apt to turn to desperate measures. This could be very dangerous.

This is an insecure, uncertain, dangerous world. How can we increase security in this sense, in the enlarged sense of assuring each person on Earth a supply of basic needs, so that there is no longer a need to worry? Probably we have to remove first the large-scale uncertainties in international politics and economics, by creating a "New International Order" (note: not just a "new international economic order," but also political, military, social, cultural . . .).

From the standpoint of research, this means finding out how we could create this New International Order -- that is, collecting ideas and somehow testing them for effectiveness. If we collect data on "comparative crises," we might find out which measures of alleviating past crises have worked successfully and which ones did not. This would be a useful way of "learning from history," rather than the usual unthinking translation of experience from, say, the Munich settlement of 1939 (where the lesson was that "appeasement of dictators does not pay") to the situation in Vietnam in the 1960s, which was not similar enough to allow a fruitful application of that lesson. What we are saying is that, for learning from history, we must be much more scientific: pay careful attention to the comparative aspects of crises, and make sure that the relevant conditions really are analogous enough, before jumping to conclusions.

We are not simply calling for research to be done that does not yet exist. A lot of it has been done already, and a good part of it was presented at the Colgate COPRED conference. We could cite Butterworth's work on managing political and military crises by international organizations; Daniel Frei on the factors that make international mediation effective; Naroll's survey of deterrence in history; Louis Kriesberg on peace initiatives and their success/failure scores; Gene Sharp on non-violence and how well it has worked in particular instances; and Betty Goetz Lall on U.N. peace-keeping.

Dorothy Baker, a drama teacher from New York who has written a book on Transformation or Catastrophe, presents a model of the development of a crisis which follows the pattern

of Greek drama: an "exposition" stage in which the conflict starts slowly, an "inciting action" which sharpens the conflict, a "progression" in which the action and the tension level rises, a "climax" of maximum tension, and then "resolution" -- a phase during which the conflicting parties either clash and destroy each other, or in which they arrive at a creative solution of the conflict. A crisis is both a danger and an opportunity -- the Chinese word for "crisis" is composed of those two parts. Baker applies this model to several civilizations and finds it is in accord with certain historical dates. The whole scheme is similar to Toynbee's interpretation of history. From this, too, we can learn which historical conflicts were resolved constructively -- not many, it would seem, since most of the civilizations she describes are no longer with us. But we could learn from the failures as well as the successes; it is important to know what not to do.

We all know where some of the crisis potentials are today. Some are in the East-West conflict and some in the North-South conflict. Emphasis should also be put on certain typical patterns in purely local conflicts, such as exist along the string of 24 nations, extending in a large "arc of crisis" from the Southern tip of Africa through the Middle East to East Asia, and from there to the "superpower triangle" of China, USSR, USA. We have called this string of nations "the fuse," meaning the fuse to the bomb which is the world. This implies that wars could diffuse along this string and spread all the way to the "top," i.e. the superpowers.

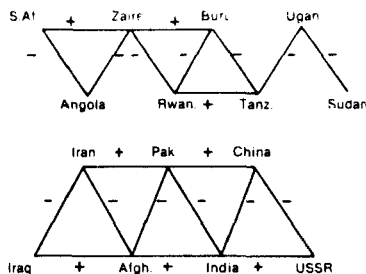


Fig. 1. Part of the fuse as of about 1973.

This is because of the particular configuration of patterns of hostility and friendship along the string: each nation is surrounded by two hostile neighbours, and these two hostile neighbours are allies of each other. So we have a string of "two-against-one" alliances, and each nation can feel "surrounded" or "encircled" by enemies. Neighbouring countries also often support rebels within each other's territories -- on the basis of nationalistic, religious, or ideological affinities. All the countries are overarmed, in the sense of spending a large proportion of their GNP on the military (cf. Alan Newcombe's "tensiometer" publications). Many of them are potential nuclear proliferators.

This "fuse" invites another metaphor: that of an earthquake fault, along which earthquakes and volcanoes tend to occur. Edward Azar also speaks of "protracted conflict" there (something like Kenneth Boulding's concept of "stable war"), in which war is the usual state of affairs and peace only an exception, so that peace is seen as a "crisis" (Azar). That is, people know how to react in war, but don't know how to act in peace, because they have not experienced it. As a result, uncertainty is now associated with peace, and certainty with war. It is in this sense that Azar speaks of peace as crisis in these unfortunate regions.

This state of "stable war" is the opposite from the picture of "stable peace" in the OECD regions of the world, which Bruce Russett has suggested. There, war is almost unimaginable, and peace is the accepted, general state of affairs. Kenneth Boulding suggests that the world may be moving increasingly in the direction of "stable peace," and makes research and policy suggestions which can aid in that.

Dorothy Baker believes that the climax of the world conflict will happen around 1982. I see it as the following question: will the zone of "stable war" spread from the "fuse" nations to the rest of the world, or will the zone of "stable peace" spread from the OECD nations to the rest of the world? If our research could tell us the conditions for controlling the rates of spread, we might be able to influence this process.

NOTES

1. Chapter 15 of Bruce Russett and Harvey Starr (1981) is based on the talk which Bruce Russett presented to the COPRED-Colgate Conference, wherein he explored the conditions for peace in the OECD region.

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